

REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

9 October 2025

Withdrawal of the Coroners' Society of England and Wales (CSEW) from the Joint Negotiating Committee

Report by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

The Remuneration Committee is RECOMMENDED to

- a) Take note of the current national position and the proposed actions to determine the localised position of the Council
- b) Confirm agreement to align Coroner pay to the judicial pay scale effective from 1 April 2025 and approve the uplift in additional financial resources

Executive Summary

1. Oxfordshire County Council (the Council) has been informed that the Coroners' Society of England and Wales (CSEW) has decided to withdraw from the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC), opting instead to negotiate Coroner pay directly with local authorities commencing on 1 April 2025. This was not a local or isolated action, but a collective move reflecting widespread concerns about the appropriateness of the JNC as a forum for determining judicial salaries for Coroners. The decision was taken following an overwhelming vote by the CSEW Council members, as communicated to all relevant authorities.
 - Coroners' employment and JNC role: Coroners are independent judicial office holders who are not employed by local authorities. Their independence is a fundamental principle, recognised in both national guidance and judicial standards. Although they are not technically employees; local authorities are responsible for paying their salaries. The JNC previously recommended salary scales for Coroners remunerated by local authorities, with representation from both local government and the Coroners' Society.
 - The Council's Coroners and pay rates: The Council currently has one Senior Coroner and one Area Coroner, both of whom operate with significant autonomy over a complex jurisdiction that encompasses national military repatriations, fire services, prisons, and multiple hospitals.
 - Other local authorities' approaches: The Council has engaged with regional employers and has discovered that another local authority has aligned Coroner pay with judicial salaries, reflecting the complex and

- varied nature of the role, which is similar to the situation faced by the Council.
- Fixing Coroners' salary and any future increases to salary to an externally independent body, such as aligning with the judicial pay scale, is essential to preserving this independence. The Lady Chief Justice has emphasised that salaries should be underpinned by judicial remuneration, and the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles (2003, revised 2023) state unequivocally that 'judicial salaries and benefits should be set by an independent body and their value should be maintained'. This approach avoids inappropriate comparisons with chief officers and ensures the separation of powers is respected.
 - Proposal for Coroners' pay: A proposal has been put forward at annex 1 of this report.

Exempt Information

2. The report is partially exempt. Annexes 1 and 2 set out confidential financial information which should not be shared publicly. The information in this case is exempt in that it falls within the following prescribed category:
1. Information relating to a particular individual.
 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

and since it is considered that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

3. Background

In April 2025, Oxfordshire County Council (the Council) received correspondence from the Local Government Association (LGA) to inform the Council that the CSEW had voted in favour of withdrawing from the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) on the basis that it was no longer fit for purpose and is not a proper method of determining a judicial salary for Coroners.

The letter of notice from CSEW set out that Coroners would be negotiating directly with their relevant local authority in respect of pay from 1 April 2025.

Coroners have indicated they believe their role aligns with that of a Circuit Judge in the judicial system, further to a Korn Ferry Hay role review in 2017 following a joint instruction by the LGA and CSEW.. Coroners have also provided responses from the Lady Chief Justice for England and Wales which sets out considerations based on salaries being underpinned by judicial remuneration

4. Recognition of Coroners Independence and Judicial Parity

Coroners are not employees; they are appointed by local authorities but are independent judicial office holders. That said, local authorities are responsible for paying the salary or fee for Coroners and may in addition employ support

staff who are likely to be on NJC (local government services) terms and conditions.

With that “employment” distinction in mind, the JNC (the scope of which relates to Coroners in England and Wales who are remunerated by local authorities) has had the key task to consider salary scales and to make recommendations in regard to such scales to the appointing authorities.

The “management side” of the JNC is represented by elected councillors appointed by the LGA and Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), and the “officers’ side” is represented by delegates appointed by the Coroners’ Society of England and Wales.

5. Oxfordshire Coroners

Oxfordshire, through the Council, utilises the services of 1 x Senior Coroner, and 1 x Area Coroner and further Coroner support as required. The current pay rates for Coroners are set out in Annex 1.

Oxfordshire’s Coroners’ landscape is one of complexity, given the areas covered, including the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, prisons, a teaching hospital and multiple specialist health hospitals within the county. Our Oxfordshire Coroners also take the national lead on military repatriations and inquests. The Oxfordshire Coroners have more autonomy to act than in some areas and are the sole decision makers in their field. There is no escalation route within the Council, and they are the source of all professional knowledge in this area.

6. What have other local authorities done?

The Council has been in communication with the LGA, as well as regional employers, including Southeast Employers, West Midlands Employers and Northwest Employers. In addition, officers have attended national meetings, to understand the impact in other areas, and to understand how local authorities are approaching this issue. Many authorities have not yet decided on their approach; however, the Council is aware that at least one other Council had progressed with local negotiations.

The Council is in a fortunate position in that there is close communication with the Coroners, and discussions remain amicable in terms of finding a solution. It is therefore in all parties’ best interests to determine a satisfactory approach as swiftly as possible.

7. Proposal for Coroners Pay

The proposed Coroners pay, reasoning for the proposal and implications for the Council’s budget are set out in Annex 1.

Financial Implications

8. The proposal at Annex 1 would require an increase in funding. It has been confirmed that the required funding would be available from the funding set aside for pay inflation for 2025/26.

Comments checked by:

Thomas James, Head of Financial Services,
thomas.james@oxfordshire.gov.uk (Finance)

Legal Implications

9. The Council is a “relevant authority” for the purposes of The Coroners and Justice Act 2009. Sections 23-24 make provision for the appointment of senior coroners, area coroners and assistant coroners by the relevant authority. The Council as the relevant authority must also make provision for staff and accommodation to support the coroners in its area to carry out their functions.

Up until April 2025, the Joint Negotiating Committee for Coroners (JNC) negotiated Coroner salaries. Coroner pay is now no longer nationally set and is determined at the local level to reflect local factors. The Council as the relevant authority is therefore responsible for reviewing and negotiating Coroner pay.

Comments checked by:

Jay Akbar – Head of Legal and Governance
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Staff Implications

10. There are no staff implications to declare in respect of this report. This item relates to Coroners who are not employees of the Council.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

There are no equality and inclusion implications to declare in respect of this report.

Sustainability Implications

11. There are no identified sustainability implications in respect of this report.

Risk Management

12. The proposals set out in Annex 1 have factored in risk management. The move from national to local negotiations requires the Council to determine a solution to the issue to avoid service disruption.

Anita Bradley
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: Annex 1 – Proposal for Coroners Pay
 Annex 2 – Supporting Evidence

Contact Officer: Leah Jones, Interim Strategic Pay and Reward Manager

October 2025